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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004426

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SUNNI ARABS HEAD INTO ELECTIONS DIVIDED AND WITHOUT CLEAR REJECTION OF INSURGENCY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David Satterfield.
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: With only two days left before the registration deadline, there is no united Sunni Arab coalition in the offing for the December elections. Sunni Arab leaders, fractured since Saddam's fall, appear just as divided heading into the coming vote. There is no preeminent leader among them and no shared vision for the future. They are against federalism and the constitution but torn over the relevance of a Ba'athist platform in a post-Saddam world. As a result, the competing lists that are emerging appear to be marriages of convenience, not conviction. Each slate mixes Islamists, nationalists, pan-Arabists, neo-Ba'athists, tribal shaykhs and liberals.

2. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Most influential Sunni Arab leaders have decided not to join Allawi's coalition because they appear convinced that marginalized Sunni Arabs will want to vote for their sect, not for a rainbow coalition. Many Sunni Arab leaders are also stopping short of forming tickets that denounce the insurgency because they appear convinced that Sunni Arab voters are too aggrieved and sympathetic to the resistance to vote against it. As a result, Allawi's coalition may offer Sunni Arabs the only clear vote against the insurgency and for cross-sectarian cooperation. The remaining slates will funnel votes toward mixed lists of candidates who reject the status quo but offer wildly different approaches to changing it. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

3. (C) Sunni Arab leaders united in rejecting the constitution have failed to converge on a single plank for the December elections. Some appear to have split because of disagreements over the legitimacy of the insurgency but most appear to have split because of ego clashes and continuing differences over the relevance of Ba'athist ideology in a post-Saddam age. The National Dialogue Council, an amalgam of Islamists and Ba'athists who joined the constitution drafting committee, appears to have fractured for good.

4. (C) All of the slates will promise voters a thorough re-working of Iraq's constitution and a rollback of federalism. They are also likely to pay lip service to national unity while pushing a clearly Sunni-dominant agenda. Sunni Arab candidates are likely to announce their candidacy in the following competing slates by week's end:

-- NATIONAL CONSENSUS FRONT: This grouping will include the Iraqi Islamic Party, Sunni Conference, Sunni Waqf, and several National Dialogue Council leaders. The list mixes extreme Islamists like the Dialogue Council's Abd al-Nasser al-Janabi with moderate Islamists like former Waqf Director Adnan al-Duleimi. It also mixes moderates who deeply opposed the Ba'ath regime like Ayad Samarai with tribal shaykhs who were considered Saddam allies like Khalaf al-Ayan. It even includes a few secularists, such as Deputy Prime Minister Abid Mutlak al-Jaburi who says in private that he dislikes Islamist influence in the government. The list will probably attempt to promote itself as the best moderate option to Sunni Arab voters who want to ensure their sect is represented in national politics. Candidates like al-Jaburi notwithstanding, it will also position itself as the slate with clearest Sunni Islamist identity.

-- PATRIOTIC IRAQI LIST: Allawi's coalition, which includes a host of Shia personalities, has drawn in several Sunni Arab leaders, among them Vice President Ghazi al-Yawar, former TNA Speaker Hachim al-Hasani, Republican Gathering leader Sa'ad al-Janabi and Minister of State for Provincial Affairs Shaykh Saad Hardan. Here, too, the Sunni Arab candidates each represent a competing trend of politics. Yawar and Hardan are tribal shaykhs with traditional inclinations and no deep political ideology. Hasani is a westernized former-Islamist with strong liberal tendencies. Janabi, meanwhile, is a former Ba'ath apparatchik who fled the country with Husayn Kamil.

Their shared calculation, and likely shared message, is that their list offers the best ticket to national unity in a political system threatened by sectarian discord. These three Sunni Arabs are also among the most pro-American of any in the Sunni Arab community (Hasani is an American citizen.)

-- IRAQI NATIONAL FRONT: The name of this group could still change, but it appears that several groups have signed on to the slate. They include National Dialogue figures Salah al-Mutlak and Hasan Zaydan al-Luheibi, United Iraqi Congress leader Anwar al-Nada al-Luheibi, and Iraqi National Movement leader Hatem al-Mukhlis. This list, perhaps more than any other, appears riven by differences. Mukhlis told PolOff confidentially October 25 that his decision to

SIPDIS cooperate with Mutlak is purely financial. "An ocean separates his views and mine," he said. The list makes an odd marriage between unrepentant Ba'athists like Mutlak and Hasan Zaydan, a former Iraqi Army general, and moderate figures who consider themselves victims of the Ba'ath regime, like Mukhlis. The list also joins purely nationalist figures with tribal politicians. Mukhlis acknowledged to PolOff that he had far more in common with Allawi and even the Iraqi Islamic Party but did not see any way to run with them. Mutlak's loud voice is likely to cast this list as a nationalist, neo-Ba'ath slate with the clearest resistance credentials. He has already promoted himself as the leader of the resistance's "political wing." Mukhlis, whose father was murdered by the Ba'athists, and Anwar al-Nada, a reflexive anti-Ba'athist, are both repelled by that message but expect it to emerge nevertheless. Mukhlis said he doubts the alliance will hold together past Election Day.

-- NATION RECONCILIATION AND LIBERATION FRONT: TNA Member Mish'an Jaburi, one of the few Sunni Arabs to independently win a seat in the last assembly, insisted on running his own slate in this election. In the process, he rebuffed several Sunni Arab leaders who sought an alliance but were unwilling to declare fealty to him. Jaburi has been able to hold out and run alone because he is reportedly wealthy from lucrative business ties to the former regime (and, many say, cash from Kurdish leader Masud Barzani). He is also well positioned for self-promotion with 6 seats on the Salah al-Din Provincial Council, his own newspaper, and a satellite station in the works. Jaburi is likely to run as a maverick, offering a third-way for Sunni Arabs uninterested in Ba'athists or Islamists.

-- NUMEROUS INDEPENDENT SLATES LIKELY: There are indications that a host of Sunni Arab personalities whose egos outsize their popularity will also run independent slates. Former Anbar Governor and tribal Shaykh Fasal Gaoud insisted to PolOff on October 25 that he would run a list in every governorate under the name the Iraqi Solidarity Council. Samara Shaky Tawas al-Jabr, who rode the coattails of the Shia coalition to a seat in the National Assembly, is reportedly pushing his own coalition in Nine. Iraqi National Gathering leader Hussein Jaburi, whose party holds three seats in Salah al-Din's council, is not reported to have allied with any larger coalition. A host of other names are sure to emerge when the lists are made public next week.

Satterfield